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FILE ONLY

Filipino bankers: Marcos planned Reagan payments

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MANILA, Philippines — Ferdinand E. Marcos had a complex plan to gain U.S. government favor that included donating tens of millions of dollars to the campaigns of President Reagan and Vice President Bush and arranging "sweetheart" business deals with close Reagan associates, a group of Filipino international bankers and attorneys has alleged.

The allegations, which several U.S. officials strongly denied, are contained in a March 1 memo from the bankers that was offered on March 8 to a newly formed Philippine government commission tracing the overseas investments of Marcos and the former president's associates.

The banking group, which has insisted on anonymity for its 14 members except for one spokesman, offered no documentation or other support for its contentions.

In many cases, the memo does not make clear whether the allegations had been merely planned or were carried out. The group has asked for access to documents recovered from the presidential palace to prove its accusations.

Jovito Salonga, chairman of the commission seeking to recover overseas Marcos assets valued at as much as \$10 billion, said the commission had not yet acted on the charges. Another commission source said that "the report contains some useful leads ... and we have to take it from there."

Antonio Gatmaitan, spokesman for the bankers, said the group submitted the memo "because of concern that the Reagan administration may protect Marcos to the extent that recovery of hidden wealth in the U.S. could be blocked."

The U.S. government provided passage to Hawaii for Marcos and about 90 others, including members of his family, associates and staff members,

when his regime fell last month. Since then, the administration has said that Philippine government requests for the freezing or recovery of Marcos assets must be handled in the courts.

According to the memo, nearly \$60 million was to be funneled to the Reagan-Bush campaigns in 1980 and 1984 through a variety of conduits. The memo specifies that "\$7 million was to be contributed to the Reagan-Bush campaign in 1980; \$10 million was to be contributed to various candidates in the 1982 off-year U.S. elections; \$50 million was to be distributed to the various committees and groups created to help Reagan and Bush" in 1984.

Under U.S. election law, it is illegal for a presidential or congressional candidate to accept contributions from a foreigner. It is also illegal for any contributor to launder money through someone else, in effect hiding the real source of the donation. The law sets a \$1,000-per-election limit on the amount any individual can contribute to a candidate, and a \$5,000 limit for political action committees.

The memo also says that Marcos instructed his agents to "systematically target and cultivate key U.S. political interests and personalities," including CIA director William Casey, former national security adviser Richard V. Allen, Sen. Paul Laxalt (R., Nev.), Secretary of State George P. Shultz and Secretary of Defense Caspar W. Weinberger.

In Washington, several U.S. officials named in the memo dismissed the allegations as untrue and far-fetched.

"I've never heard anything about it," said Edward J. Rollins, who was White House political director before managing the 1984 Reagan-Bush campaign. "Where it's preposterous is that the most you can give is \$5,000. Prominent Filipino-Americans may have contributed to Republican candidates — I just don't know. There certainly wasn't anything orchestrated.

"And there never were any overtures made from Marcos or his people, even when Marcos was here visiting. Frequently when world leaders are here, their political people would make a courtesy call. But they didn't do that. This is just absurd."

White House spokesman Larry Speakes said that he was not aware of the allegations, but that the Reagan-Bush campaign followed all U.S. campaign laws.

Washington lawyer Dean Burch, Bush's personal attorney, also denied the allegations. "Just as a logical matter, if you were doing anything like that, you'd want the credit," Burch said. "You wouldn't get any because George has no idea what his investments are, and neither do I. That's the nature of a blind trust."

The memo says that in addition to contributing to the Bush campaign, former Energy Minister Geronimo Velasco was to establish a business relationship with three companies in which Bush held substantial interests — Overbey Oil Development Corp., Zapata Petroleum Corp. and Zapata Offshore Co. It was to be done through the Philippine National Oil Co. and its foreign subsidiaries, the memo said.

Tom Loranger, a spokesman for Laxalt, said there was "absolutely no substance whatsoever to this purported memo's references about Sen. Laxalt." The memo said that Marcos associate Roberto Benedicto, representing the Manila Bay Casino, sought the counsel of Laxalt in connection with the intended purchase of a Las Vegas casino operation for Filipino interests.

The memo also says that from 1976 to 1981, a top Philippine company engaged the legal services of William Casey, who is now CIA director, and that Roman Cruz Jr. engaged the services of Bechtel Corp. as project managers for the Manila Hotel Corp. and other projects in order to widen the avenues of contact between Marcos and former Bechtel executives Shultz and Weinberger.

Knight-Ridder correspondents Pete Carey and Carl M. Cannon contributed to this report.